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Parental Involvement at Home: Analyzing the Influence of Parents' Socioeconomic Status

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the relationship between parent's socioeconomic status and parental involvement in their child's education at home. Eighty Indian students who were studying in one the best performance-based National Type Tamil Schools in the state of Kedah, Malaysia were chosen based on purposive sampling. It comprised 20 students from Year Two, 20 students from Year Three, 20 students from Year Four and 20 students from Year Five. Of these 80 students, 40 low-achieving students and 40 high-achieving students were identified based on the previous final year school examination results. A questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative data related to the parent's socio-economic background and their involvement strategies in their children's education at home from the students' parents. The findings of this study indicated that most parents, regardless of their socioeconomic background showed a high degree of involvement in most of the involvement strategies at home to ensure their child's educational success. However, the parent's education level, employment status, and income among the parents from the lower socioeconomic class affect their understanding and knowledge on the actual values that need to be placed on their child's education. As a result, the higher the parent's socioeconomic status, the greater the parent's involvement in their child's education. As a result, the parents inculcate good skills, behaviour and values of education in their children which are extremely important for their academic success.

Keywords: Parental involvement; Socioeconomic;

INTRODUCTION

A child's capability to succeed in school depends on how successfully the child is managed by his/her parents in the home environment. It is an environment where the child learns the skills, attitudes and behaviour which could mould them into a productive and successful student. However, not every child comes from a home that could provide them with the requisite educational resources necessary for their academic success. In accordance with that, a parent's socioeconomic status plays an important role in providing these educational resources and it appears to impose the greatest impact on the child's educational outcomes.

A substantial body of evidence confirms that parent's from a higher socioeconomic level show higher involvement in their children's education than parents from a lower socioeconomic level. A number of studies also have pointed out that other indicators such as social class, race and ethnicity influence parental involvement in their child's education. However, in the context of Malaysia, very little attention has been given to the issue of parental involvement in education. Furthermore, studies on minority groups, especially the Indians, are also very limited. Thus, the present study focuses on the relationship between parent's socioeconomic status and parental involvement strategies in their child's education among Indian parents who have enrolled their children in a National Type Tamil School.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A large array of information appears in the literature on the issue of parental involvement. The two main aspects studied by many scholars are; firstly, parents socioeconomic status and parental involvement; and secondly, parental involvement and students' achievement. However, one significant finding that has been explored widely is the absence of parental involvement and how it affects the students' achievement in general.

The influence of parent's socioeconomic status on parental involvement has been well documented in explaining how the socioeconomic level of parents is translated into their child's school achievement. Katsilis and Robinson's (1990) study on 395 public high schools' seniors reported that the parent's socioeconomic status influence the educational success of their child at school to a greater extent. Similarly, Eagle's (1989) study also pointed out that parental involvement consistently related to educational attainment. Eagle (1989) showed that the children whose parents read to them often during their childhood had higher levels of achievement. McNeal Jr (2001) in his study also pointed out that parental involvement has greater effects on children from a higher socioeconomic level.

Ho Sui-Chu and Willms's (1996) study on eighth-grade students, their parents and teachers at public and private schools in United States indicated that parent's socioeconomic status has significant and positive relationship on parental involvement in their child's education. However, the relationship found was not strong. In addition, a study conducted by Desimone, L.M. (1999) on eighth-grade students to examine the effects of the students' socioeconomic status on parental involvement. The findings of the study revealed that the students' socioeconomic status influence parental involvement and the students' achievement. The higher the family income, the greater would be the parental involvement; and this enables the students to achieve high scores in mathematics and reading. Shaver & Wall's (1998) study that investigated the impact of parental involvement on reading and mathematics achievements of eighth-grade students also found that the children from the higher socioeconomic families achieved academic success in reading and mathematics due to effective parental involvement. Furthermore, Lueptow (1975) conducted a study on high school seniors in twenty Wisconsin public high schools and found that students who perform well at school are from the urban areas, who have educated parents with a higher occupation status and come from a higher income home.

A number of studies on parental involvement suggest that parent's education level is an important indicator in fostering parental involvement in their child's education. The higher the standard of the parents' education level, the higher would be the academic aspirations for their

child (Lockheed, et al., 1989). Thus, the parents are highly involved in their children's education. Consistent with the idea discussed above, Balli, et al., (1998) in their study on 74 sixth-grade students found that parents with a low level of education encounter difficulties in helping their child with homework. The parents need help from the schools to assist their children. Baker and Stevenson (1986) who interviewed 41 mothers of eighth-graders from middle school found that well-educated mothers have more knowledge of their child's schooling than the less educated mothers, and that these educated mothers are more aware of their child's education and his/her achievement. In addition, they take greater effort to use homework strategies and monitor their child's progress in education. In addition, Poston and Falbo's study (1990) also found that parents who are highly educated often communicate and interact with their children. Another study carried out by Lockheed, et al. (1989) on Grade Eight students also reported that children whose mothers are highly educated and fathers are professionals obtain high scores in Mathematics.

2. METHODOLOGY

Sample

Based on purposive sampling, eighty Indian students aged 8-11 years from one of the best performance-based National Type Tamil Schools in the state of Kedah, Malaysia were chosen for the purpose of this study. They comprised twenty students from Year Two, twenty students from Year Three, twenty students from Year Four and another twenty students from Year Five. Of the twenty students that have been chosen from each Year, ten students were from the lowest achievement category and ten others were from the highest achievement category, and they were identified based on the previous final year school examination results. From the 80 students who were chosen, one parent for each student was selected (according to the student's view about the individual who spends the most time being involved in their education) to be the respondent for this study. This will provide an explanation about the parent's background and their involvement in their child's education.

Instrument

In this study, a questionnaire was used by the researcher to obtain quantitative data from the selected parents. Questions were adapted from Walker, et al., (2005). However, the researcher has modified the structure of the questions according to the objective of the current study and made some changes in its response format. In this study, the questionnaire was divided into six parts that is *parent's background, parental involvement at home, parental involvement at school, school's cooperation on parental involvement at home, school's cooperation on parental*

involvement at school and parent's perception on school. This paper only focuses on the first two components, that is, *parent's background* specifically on the parent's socioeconomic status and *parental involvement at home*.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions which were related to the parent's background such as gender, age, home, education status, occupation, income and household income, number of children, number of school-going children and number of children who are already working. The second part of the questionnaire was related to the questions on parental involvement at home. This part of the questionnaire consisted of ten questions which measured the parental involvement shown by the parents at home.

Method

All the respondents in this study were informed about the nature of this study. Out of eighty questionnaires distributed to respondents, eight were not returned. The questionnaire containing questions on parent's background and the parental involvement in their child's education was used by the researcher to obtain quantitative data from the respondents. For each question on parental involvement, the respondents were asked to pick one of the following five responses: 'Daily', 'Few times a week', 'Few times a month', 'Once every few months' or 'Never' for each strategy regarding the parents' involvement in their child's education. Each respondent who was engaged in the study

was informed that all the information provided by the respondent would be kept confidential.

All the information gathered from the respondents from the questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The reliability analysis showed that all ten items in the category of '*parental involvement at home*' were consistent. The Cronbach's alpha measure was 0.95 which indicates that the measure of these items is reliable.

3. RESULTS

Looking into the family background of the respondents studied, the findings of the study show that 76.4% of the parents studied were female. This is a clear indication that mothers are more involved with their child and spend more time with them in helping with their child's education. Mothers tend to have a greater responsibility in helping with their child's education compared to fathers (23.6%). The majority of the parents are aged between 31-40 years (65.3%). About 93.1% of the parents were from the urban area. Only 6.9% of the parents came from the rural area. Since the school is located in the heart of a town, it enables the parents to send their children to the school located nearby to their homes. It was observed that only 22.2% of the parents are single parents; with either one of the parents dead, divorced or separated.

Table 1
Parent's Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic Status		Percentage (%)
Level of education	No formal education	2.8
	Did not complete primary education	8.3
	Completed primary education	9.7
	Did not complete secondary education	15.3
	Completed secondary education	36.1
	Certificate/Diploma holders	19.4
	Degree	6.9
Occupation	Masters/PhD	1.4
	Not working	40.3
	Working-class	29.2
Income	Middle-class	30.6
	None	40.3
	RM1000 and below	27.8
	RM1001 - RM2000	13.9
	RM2001 - RM3000	8.3
	RM3001 - RM4000	4.2
	RM4001 - RM5000	2.8
Household income	RM5001 and above	2.8
	RM1000 and below	12.5
	RM1001 - RM2000	19.4
	RM2001 - RM3000	33.3
	RM3001 - RM4000	15.3
	RM4001 - RM5000	2.8
	RM5001 and above	16.7

n = 72 respondents

Table 1 presents the socioeconomic status of the parents in this study. It can be seen from the data in Table 1 that 2.8% of the parents never went to school while 8.3% of the parents did not complete primary education. Moreover, 9.7% of the parents only completed primary education. Meanwhile, 15.3% of the parents in this study managed to go to secondary school but did not complete their secondary education. About 36.1% of the parents completed secondary education but there was no evidence that they had passed their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (a mandatory public examination for Form Five students). Only 27.7% of the parents in this study completed their tertiary education and from this percentage, 19.4% of the parents had completed a course either at Certificate or Diploma level. Only 6.9% of the parents completed their degree and one respondent (1.4%) completed her education at postgraduate level.

As shown in Table 1, 29.2% of the parents in this study are from the working class. Generally the parents work as labourers in the nearby factories. Only 30.6% of the parents are from the middle-class and they work in four main fields, namely, professional, technical, administration and clerical, service and business. Parents with a higher level of education, especially those who possess a certificate, diploma, first degree or a higher degree, have a stable job. The other 40.3% of the respondents studied were housewives. This includes some who possess a Certificate, Diploma and some who even have a degree.

It is apparent from Table 1 that 27.8% of the parents studied earn a total income of RM1000.00 and below a month. Another 13.9% of the parents earn between RM1001.00-RM2000.00 a month and 8.3% of the parents earn between RM2001.00-RM3000.00 a month. Moreover, 4.2% of the parents earn a total income of between RM3001.00-RM4000.00 per month. In addition, 2.8% of the parents earn between RM4001.00-RM5000.00 a month while another 2.8% of the parents in this study earn a total income of more than RM5000.00 a month. However, 40.3% of the parents in this study have no income since they are housewives.

The findings of this study also show that 65.2% of the parent's household income is RM3000.00 and below. As shown in Table 1, 12.5% of the parent's household income is RM1000.00 and below. On the other hand, 19.4% of the parent's household income is between RM1001.00-RM2000.00. The other 33.3% of the parent's household income is between RM2001.00-RM3000.00. Another

15.3% parent's household income is between RM3001.00-RM4000.00 and 2.8% of the parent's household income is between RM4001.00-RM5000.00. Only 16.7% of the parent's household income is more than RM5000.00. This justifies that only a small percentage of the parents studied have a good form of economic capital. The high level of education especially among the middle-class parents provides them with better opportunities to earn a higher salary. In addition, 88.9% of the parent's have at least one to two children who are working and this gives them greater stability in terms of household income and economic capital.

The following section examines the correlation between parent's socioeconomic status and the ten strategies of parental involvement observed at home. Though the strength of the relationship is not very strong, it is moderate and significant in most of the strategies of parental involvement. Table 2 provides the correlations between the parent's socioeconomic status and the ten strategies of parental involvement.

As shown in Table 2, household income has a greater impact on parental involvement strategies than parent's education level, income and occupation status. The bivariate relationship between parent's household income and the parental involvement strategies at home shows that the relationship is moderate for nine of the ten strategies implemented. All nine strategies implemented are significant at the $p = 0.01$ level. Hence, there is evidence that parents with higher household income are more involved in their child's education. As can be seen from Table 2, parents with a higher household income are more involved in identifying their child's homework given by the school every day ($r = 0.50$, $p < 0.01$), discussing their child's activities in school in order to get an overview of the things done by their children in school ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). They are also more likely to be involved in identifying the learning patterns of their children ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), providing time limits for their children for studying activities ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and in guiding their children with their preparations for school examinations ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, they are also more likely to be involved in identifying the academic problems faced by them at home ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$) and at school ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$). The parents with a higher household income are also more involved in assisting their child with school homework if the child encounters difficulties in completing it ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 2
Correlation Between Parents' Socioeconomic Status and Strategies of Parental Involvement

Parental Involvement Strategies	Parents' Socioeconomic Status			
	Education (r)	Occupation (r)	Income (r)	Household Income (r)
Discussion on future planning	0.14	0.16	0.10	0.08
Discussion on school activities	0.42**	0.36**	0.37**	0.47**
Identifying academic problems at school	0.32**	0.25*	0.28*	0.41**
Identifying academic problems at home	0.34**	0.32**	0.32**	0.43**
Assisting with homework	0.25*	0.21	0.13	0.32**
Identifying homework	0.27*	0.21	0.28*	0.50**
Guidance for examination	0.27*	0.15	0.26*	0.45**
Motivation	0.29*	0.35**	0.32**	0.40**
Time Limits	0.32**	0.29*	0.29*	0.45**
Identifying learning patterns	0.32**	0.25*	0.27*	0.45**

n = 72 respondents

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The parents' education level and the parental involvement strategies at home show that the relationship is moderate for five out of nine strategies and it is significant at the $p = 0.01$ level. Hence, the parents with more education are more involved in their child's education. As can be seen from Table 2, the findings show that parents with more education often talk about the activities engaged by their child in school ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). They are also more likely to be involved in identifying their academic problems at home ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$) and at school ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$), identifying the learning patterns of their children ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) and in providing time limits for their children for studying activities ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$).

As shown in Table 2, parent's occupation and their income only show a moderate relationship on three strategies each. Parents with higher occupational status are more involved in discussing their child's activities in school in order to get an overview of the things done by their children in school ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), in motivating their child ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$) and identifying the academic problems faced by them at home ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, parents with higher parent's income are more involved in discussing their child's activities in school ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$), identifying the academic problems faced by them at home ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) and in motivating their child ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$).

4. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study is to document the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement strategies at home in their child's education. The results show that parents are involved in various strategies at home to help their child succeed in education. Based on the results, the parents are involved in identifying their child's homework given by the school every day, discussing their child's activities in school in order to get an overview of the things done by their children in school.

They are also more likely to be involved in identifying the learning patterns of their children, providing time limits for their children for studying activities and in guiding their children with their preparations for school examinations. Moreover, they are also more likely to be involved in identifying the academic problems faced by them at home and at school. The parents are also more involved in assisting their child with school homework if the child encounters difficulties in completing it. In addition, they also often discuss their child's future with them.

However, these parental actions are associated with the parent's socioeconomic status as well. The findings of the current study are consistent with the findings of Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) which suggest that parents are involved in discussing school activities and helping their children plan their programs although the relationship is not strong. The findings of study are also in agreement with Baker and Stevenson (1986) who indicated that parents of higher socioeconomic status have better management skills and they manage their children well by supporting their children's educational needs. The findings of study also support Lockheed, et al. (1989), Katsilis and Robinson (1990) and Shaver and Wall (1998)'s study which suggest that children from a higher socioeconomic status experience higher parental involvement in their education.

The results of the current study indicate that parent's household income and parent's education level has a greater impact on parental involvement strategies than their income and the occupation status. In the current study, the higher the household income generated in the family, the higher would be the parental involvement at home. In this case, the parents' household income plays an important role in providing educational demands and resources that is necessary for a child to ensure his/her academic success. The family income enables the children to receive the necessary skills, knowledge, behaviour and values that are needed by the child for their academic success. The findings of this study is consistent with Lueptow

(1975) who found that parental involvement in education is higher among the parents with a higher occupation status and a higher household income. The findings are also in agreement with the study conducted by Desimone (1999) which suggests that parents' socioeconomic status (especially the family income) affects parental involvement and student's achievement.

In addition, parents with higher level of education have more knowledge and understanding on how they should be involved in their child's education. The parents in this category have better education background which enables them to provide effective involvement in their child's education. Thus, the parents who possess a higher education level generally provide more help and better quality of involvement in their child's education. Hence, well-educated parents transfer their knowledge to their child by creating positive learning attitudes and behaviour in them. The positive learning attitudes and behaviour that has been instilled in the mind of their child enables the child to achieve academic success at school. The findings of the current study is consistent with Balli, et al. (1998) who suggests that well-educated mothers take greater effort to use homework strategies and monitor their child's progress in education to ensure their child's education success. The findings of the current study are also consistent with the findings of Poston and Falbo's study (1990) who found that parents who are highly educated often communicate and interact with their children.

However, the current study highlights the need for further research to be carried out. The research that has to be carried out in future should examine the relationship between parent's socioeconomic status and parental involvement at school in ensuring academic success of their child. Future research should also address the role of ethnicity and gender and their effects on parental involvement and the child's academic achievement. In addition, a study that could explore the school's cooperation in enhancing parental involvement is much needed. These researches could provide a better understanding on how the family and the school supports or hinders parental involvement; and their effects on the child's academic achievement.

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